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ABSTRACT

Since the introduction of one-stop employment systems, many states have attempted to merge traditional employment and training services to provide consolidated programs and easier customer access to services. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA), passed in 1998, requires the formation of locally based one-stop service delivery systems to deliver many federally funded employment and training services. Four principles have guided development of the one-stop system: universal access, customer choice, service integration, and accountability. In contrast to the Job Training Partnership Act, which focused on providing training to economically disadvantaged individuals, the WIA requires delivery of one-stop services at three levels: core services, intensive services, and training services. Core services, which must be made available to all interested individuals, include access to career information resources. Intensive services include counseling, case management, and short-term prevocational services. Training services are reserved strictly for individuals who are unable to benefit through core and intensive services, with priority given to public assistance recipients and low-income individuals. The following are among the issues related to further development of the one-stop system: universal access to core services; collaboration with the welfare system; assessment of services; and serving employers. (Contains 10 references.) (MN)

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One-Stop Career Centers
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One-Stop Career Centers

Building a work force development system requires a major shift from a mindset of curing client ailments to a vision of investing in the potential of all workers while preserving the commitment to those most in need. (Perry-Varner 1998, p. 44)

Since the introduction of one-stop employment systems, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), many states have attempted to merge traditional employment and training services to provide consolidated programs, supervised by states and local communities, that enable easy customer access to services. After 1994, a number of states began creating one-stop career centers, but "the absence of a federal legislative mandate for the development of integrated state workforce development systems" was seen as a significant barrier to their implementation (Kogan et al. 1997, p. E-11). The Workforce Investment Act (WIA), passed in 1998, requires the formation of locally based one-stop service delivery systems to deliver many employment and training services funded by the federal government (Fagnoni 1999). What before was a voluntary movement to a more integrated employment and training system has now become a legislative mandate that is "unlike any change in workforce development thus far" ("Testimony of the National Association of Counties" 1999, p. 2). This **Digest** provides background on the one-stop employment and training system, describes the experiences of early one-stop career centers, and raises issues related to the continued development of the one-stop system.

The Beginnings

A number of factors led to the development of the one-stop concept, including General Accounting Office reports that highlighted the fragmentation of the existing employment and training system. The criticism contained in these reports coupled with efforts to streamline government led the DOL to undertake an initiative designed to encourage the development of an integrated employment and training system (D'Amico et al. 1999, p. 1-1; Mower 1997). The initial one-stop career system was designed to consolidate key programs, resources, and services such as unemployment insurance, state job services, public assistance, training programs, and career services (Mariani 1997; Mower 1997).

Four principles guided the development of the one-stop system (D'Amico et al. 1999; Mower 1997; Perry-Varner 1998):

1. **Universal Access**. One-stop centers are to make core work force development services available to all population groups, including job seekers and employers. Eligibility for specific programs is not a criterion for receiving services.
2. **Customer Choice**. Because customers can select services based on their needs, centers can compete for customers based on their understanding of both job seekers and employers.
3. **Service Integration**. Work force development services provided by local, state, and federal programs will be consolidated in one-stop centers.
4. **Accountability**. Centers will be evaluated on the basis of measurable outcomes with future funding tied to the results of services provided to customers.

Early Experiences

Because of their emphasis on broadening services beyond just the economically disadvantaged, the principles on which the initial one-stop system was based "foreshadowed the major tenets of the WIA" (D'Amico et al. 1999, p. 1-2). The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) legislation, which the WIA replaced, had strict eligibility requirements and a focus on providing training for the economically disadvantaged. In contrast, the WIA requires delivery of one-stop services at three levels: core services, intensive services, and training services (ibid.). These requirements mirror the design of one-stop career centers created prior to the WIA that also offered three tiers of service: self-help services, brief, staff-assisted services, and individual, case-managed services (Sampson et al. 1998).

Self-help services, sometimes referred to as self-service, include career resources that customers can access and use with little or no staff assistance. For example, many one-stops offer Internet access and also provide resources related to resume development, interviewing, and so forth. Brief, staff-assisted services may include workshops on various aspects of career development as well as individual counseling. Individual, case-managed services are similar to those delivered under JTPA and involve working individually with customers over an extended period, ensuring that they receive appropriate training and follow-up services (D'Amico et al. 1999; Sampson et al. 1998).

An evaluation of the initial one-stop implementation (Kogan et al. 1997) concluded that the one-stop centers created the greatest impact through the following:

- A new customer-oriented service philosophy that emphasizes meeting customer needs rather than following bureaucratic regulations
- The development and refinement of information self-access information tools for use by employers and individuals
- A new emphasis on making services attractive to employers and coordinating employer services across programs and funding streams (p. E-1)

The study (Kogan et al. 1997) also identified a number of factors that facilitated the development of the initial one-stop career centers, including a history of collaboration among local work force development programs, statewide plans that provided structure but also allowed for local adaptation, involvement of direct service staff from participating agencies in planning, ease of information exchange among staff from different agencies, and careful attention to the capacity building needs for delivering integrated services. Challenges to implementation included concerns about ensuring that individuals from groups with special needs have access to services, the uncertainty surrounding job security of workers from agencies combining to be part of the one-stop center, and the declining public investments in work force development programs and services. Now that one-stop career centers have a federal legislative mandate, the challenge is to use the lessons learned from the implementation of the initial centers in developing the balance of the system.

Issues in Continued Development

The WIA requirements that one-stop centers should provide core services, intensive services, and training services closely parallel the three levels of service provided in the initial sites. **Core services**, expected to be made available to all who are interested, include access to career information resources such as local labor market information, Internet job listings and information about education and training providers. **Intensive services** are those that require

some staff assistance and include counseling, case management, and short-term prevocational services. **Training services** are reserved only for those "who are unable to benefit through core and intensive services, with priority given to public assistance recipients and low-income individuals" (D'Amico et al. 1999, p. I-2). As states work on developing plans for implementing the WIA, a number of issues related to the further development of the one-stop system have been raised, including the following:

- **Universal access to core services**. The ability to provide universal access to core services will depend on one-stop partners making appropriate contributions to the establishment and maintenance of the system. Agreements about partner roles and responsibilities in one-stop centers may not be easily reached, however. Some states have not addressed the issue of cost-sharing through their planning process and thus local partners are not discussing cost sharing of any kind (Testimony of the National Association of Counties 1999).

- **Collaboration with the welfare system**. Reform of the welfare system during the past decade has changed its focus from providing cash assistance for an indefinite period to one of putting its customers to work. As a result, its goals and operations have become similar to that of the work force development system. Although the two systems have operated largely independently of one another, the passage of WIA sets the stage for collaboration between them. Reassessment of the coordination and delivery of services that is occurring as a part of the implementation of the one-stop system provides an opportunity for greater collaboration with the welfare system. Whether such collaboration can be achieved may depend on a number of factors, including state and local leadership (Fagnoni 1999). Also, bringing together required partners may present enough challenges without adding an additional, optional partner. As WIA implementation moves forward, research will be needed to determine how one-stop centers can effectively meet the needs of all its customers, including those on public assistance.

- **Assessment of services**. Another important issue for one-stop centers will be to find ways to track center use and to document the outcomes of core services. Currently, centers use a variety of methods, including sign-up sheets and electronic tracking systems, to track center use. "However, capturing the benefits of the self-service system in terms of employment outcomes or participation in training and education programs may prove to be much more difficult and expensive" (D'Amico et al. 1999, p. VII-3). Because centers will be evaluated on the basis of outcomes, mechanisms need to be developed that will provide such information.

- **Serving employers**. Employers are considered an important customer of one-stop career centers. Studies (Mower 1997) have shown, however, that business does not necessarily identify itself as a targeted customer because of a lack of marketing visibility, communication, or commitment to treating employers as customers. Many employers are also apprehensive about what they perceive to be another government initiative creating red tape and possible delays on delivering needed services.

Involvement of Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

"There is no single, best way to implement the customer-friendly, seamless delivery system envisioned in WIA. The most effective One-Stop delivery systems will spring from State and local creativity, innovation, and commitment" (McNeil 1999, p. 1). One-stop career centers provide an ideal opportunity for adult, career, and vocational educators to become involved in the work force development system. Career educators can assist with the delivery of core services. As required partners in the one-stop delivery system, adult and vocational educators can help design one-stop centers in their local area. Adult, career, and vocational educators need to use their skills and knowledge to help create innovative work force development systems that are designed to serve their customers.

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